

Statewide Behavior Analysis Training Through Distance Education

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Human services and educational agencies frequently lack qualified behavior analysts, often because of the insufficient availability of training in behavior analysis. This paper describes the statewide implementation of a distance-education-based training program to help remedy the problem.

Key words: distance education, behavior analysis training, certification, education

Many human services and educational agencies, particularly those serving persons with developmental disabilities and mental health problems, offer behavioral programming and educational services to their clients or students. These agencies have the common problem of obtaining adequate numbers of staff with formal training in behavior analysis. In some instances, the state simply may need to make universities aware of the training need in behavior analysis; the universities will respond by providing programs and training at locations across the state to prepare sufficient numbers of students to meet the statewide personnel needs. Often, however, the universities cannot or will not allocate the resources to provide the quantity and quality of training required to meet statewide needs. This may result in ad-

equately behavioral training being limited to a few sites or none at all. The state human services agencies then may face the prospect of hiring unqualified staff and training them after they have been hired.

The Developmental Disabilities Services Division (DDSD) of the Oklahoma Department of Human Services was faced with the problem of insufficient availability of qualified behavior analysts to provide programming for persons served by the agency. DDSD implemented a statewide multicomponent initiative to resolve this problem. As one component, DDSD planned to arrange for the administration of the Florida Behavior Analysis Certification Examination as part of a program to credential behavior analysts. A second component of the initiative involved training individuals in the systematic and appropriate use of applied behavior analysis for the benefit of persons with developmental disabilities. Many individuals who implemented, authored, and provided oversight for behavioral programs needed to have behavior analysis certification but did not have sufficient training to pass the examination. Other individuals did not wish to take the certification examination but were in need of training in behavior analysis in order to more effectively implement behavioral programs. High-quality graduate training was needed at both of these levels. How-

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ever, training of this nature was not available in Oklahoma, and universities in the state were unwilling to develop it. The Department of Human Services elected to develop its own statewide training effort.

PROJECT DEVELOPMENT AND IMPLEMENTATION

The senior psychologist in the DDS central office entered into a contract with Oklahoma State University which, in turn, contracted with a behavioral consulting firm to develop and conduct two graduate courses in behavior analysis. The senior psychologist and the lead consultant established a training plan that included the following training goals: (a) emphasize valuing human dignity of all clients, respecting clients' right to independence, replacement of undesirable behavior with socially acceptable behavior, and ethical considerations in the application of behavior analysis; (b) cover the broad behavior analysis approach that has been scientifically documented to be effective and do so within the context of appropriate practice in that state; (c) be of the highest caliber and be provided by faculty who have national reputations as leaders in the field, have practical experience with the subject matter, and have demonstrated excellence in teaching; (d) be convenient and available to persons across the state; (e) result in graduate credit and continuing education units being available; (f) be available for several years beyond the original contract; and (g) use state funds in the most effective and efficient manner. In addition, the training plan addressed issues such as the population to be trained, the content to be covered, the number of individuals to be trained, the selection of instructional staff, the location of training, the nature of the training materials, the format of instruction, and the process of student evaluation.

Distance education provided an efficient means to address these goals.

Distance education has been used effectively with a variety of populations, including individuals with special needs (Howard, Ault, Knowlton, & Swall, 1992), and has been provided through a number of delivery systems, including computer and interactive television options. For an overview of current applications of distance education, see Willis (1994). Although any number of delivery systems might have been appropriate for the training project, interactive television was selected for a number of reasons: (a) An interactive television system was available in the state; (b) the format was user-friendly for the faculty; (c) the use of the system was cost effective; and (d) a remote classroom was within 1 hour's travel for each student. The courses were transmitted from Oklahoma State University at Stillwater via the statewide interactive television network to 12 remote classrooms across the state. This enabled 43 students to interact directly with the instructor and other students via the two-way communication feature of the system.

The training activity was developed within the broad context of the statewide behavioral system (Johnston & Shook, 1987, 1993). For example, because the state planned to credential behavior analysts, the training reflected what was to be tested in the written certification examination (Shook, Hartsfield, & Hemingway, 1995). The development of individual presentations and the provision of training were done by 10 of the consulting firm's faculty associates, who had national reputations in behavior analysis and developmental disabilities, plus the head consultant and the senior psychologist.

Two 15-week courses were offered at the graduate level. The first course covered skills critical for those persons who implement behavioral programs. It taught students the basic principles of behavior analysis from the clinical application perspective, concentrating on how to implement behavioral programs effectively and ethically. The second course covered important skills

for individuals who develop and oversee the implementation of behavioral programs and was built on the material covered in the first course, allowing students to gain the most by taking the courses in sequence. The second course covered all aspects of decisions relating to program development and the steps necessary to provide oversight of program implementation, including issues relating to staff training and management. The courses were designed to help to prepare the students for success in taking the behavior analysis certification examination.

Each course met on Saturday mornings so as not to interfere with the work schedules of students and faculty. A faculty member arrived at the Stillwater transmission site on Friday evening and delivered two presentations on the following Saturday. The morning presentation was given before a class at the Stillwater site, was transmitted live to the remote classrooms, and was taped for use in future offerings of the course. A second presentation was taped Saturday afternoon, in front of the transmission site class, for use the following Saturday morning at the remote classrooms and for future offerings of the course. Thus, live presentations were alternated with taped presentations on Saturday mornings for the remote classrooms, while the transmission site class had live presentations both in the morning and afternoon on every other Saturday. On the alternating Saturday mornings when the taped presentations were transmitted to the remote classrooms, the senior psychologist at the transmission site and a classroom facilitator at each remote site provided the interactive function. Participants from the remote classrooms had the option of driving to the transmission site to attend both of the Saturday presentations in person. So, for example, if a student at a remote site wished to see a particular presenter in person or had a commitment the following week, he or she could attend both of the transmission site presentations and forgo the taped

session on the following Saturday. Likewise, if a student in the transmission site class had an afternoon commitment, he or she could attend that class at a remote site the following Saturday morning.

Faculty prepared multiple-choice or short-answer test questions and answer keys for each of their presentations. The questions were compiled into three 1-hr examinations for each course, and were administered by the classroom facilitator at each remote site. Students could take the courses for graduate credit through Oklahoma State University or receive continuing education units in psychology.

PROJECT RESULTS AND OUTCOMES

All of the goals established by the state were met. Oklahoma has begun using the Florida Behavior Analysis Certification Examination as a component of its credentialing process in behavior analysis. Although some of the 43 students who took one or more of the courses chose not to take the examination during its first administration, 12 individuals who took both courses did (10 of these individuals had passed both courses and 2 had taken both but passed neither). All of those who passed both courses also passed the examination, and neither of those who failed both courses passed the examination on the first administration. Only 41% passed the certification examination of their first try if they had completed none or only one of the courses. The DDS continues to make the tapes available to behavioral practitioners both within its system for general training purposes and as a means to prepare for the subsequent administrations of certification examination.

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